

NOTES FOR REMARKS TO GENERATIONS UNITED
May 13, 1999

**I'm really pleased to have a chance to join you this morning. I think Generations United is built around such an important idea, so it's always a pleasure to be able to come and share a few minutes with a group that is such a positive force.

**We all know that the issue of securing quality health care coverage is an issue that has no generational lines.

**Seniors want their grandchildren to have good health care and to grow up healthy.

**Workers know that a strong Medicare program is absolutely essential, not only to their parents' economic security, but also to their own

**You all recognize that those who try to pit one group against another, who say we can't afford Medicare because it hurts kids, or if we cover kids we're taking from seniors, really are simply spouting a thinly veiled excuse to do nothing at all.

**The truth is that we all have a stake in addressing so many health care issues:

**Dealing with the unconscionable fact that we have 43 million Americans without health care coverage, and that number is growing.

**Incidentally, isn't it incredible that in the face of that fact--and that the group right below Medicare coverage is where so many uninsured are--that the Medicare Commission recommended raising the age of eligibility for Medicare?? Clearly, what we should be doing is going the other way, and passing the Medicare Early Access bill.

**Addressing the problem of high prescription drug costs, and bringing the Medicare benefit into the modern age by covering prescription drugs

**Making the Child Health Program work so that we find and cover those uninsured kids

**Figuring out why one result of welfare reform seems to be a lot of low-income families losing their health care coverage--and fixing it

**Stepping up to the plate with some strong anti-tobacco programs. We should help smokers stop, and certainly do all we can to keep kids from ever starting

**Passing a strong and enforceable patient bill of rights. Managed care is clearly here to stay, and that makes it all the more important that we give people some protections so they can get the services they are supposed to be getting from these plans

****Finally, we have to fight changes in Medicare that are going to use economic coercion to force people into managed care plans, whether it meets their needs or not. It is unbelievable that people are ready to effectively destroy Medicare in its present form to fit into their idea of how the market is somehow going to solve all the financial problems we face in health care.**

****The fact is, if we have millions more people on Medicare when the baby boomers retire—we simply can't pay for that by putting the burden on people on Medicare, by reducing their benefits, increasing their out-of-pocket costs, and delaying their coverage. If we have more people on Medicare, we as a society have to make the commitment to pay for it. That seems the only possible response for a society that cares about the needs of its citizens.**

****You all have such an important contribution to make to this debate. You might not have the money or make the campaign contributions of the insurance industry, the provider community, or a lot of other groups—but you speak for the needs of real people—not out of self-interest, but in the public interest. That can make all the difference.**

****Keep it up.**